



Alcohol – Use and Abuse

Scotland has an alcohol problem

20% more alcohol per adult is sold in Scotland compared with England.

In Scotland a quarter of men and just under a fifth of women (18%) were categorised as hazardous or harmful drinkers (defined as men drinking more than 21 units per week and women drinking more than 14) in 2011.

Costs

In 2011, there were 1,247 alcohol-related deaths in Scotland (where alcohol was the underlying cause of death).

In 2011/12, there were 38,724 alcohol-related discharges from a general acute hospital in Scotland (a rate of 689 discharges per 100,000 population).

Alcohol harm costs Scotland £3.6 billion a year, according to a 2010 Scottish Government report. This total includes expenditure on health, social care, crime as well as how alcohol misuse damages the economy.

Policy

Successive government agencies have tried to tackle Scotland's harmful drinking culture including through public health campaigns, licensing powers for local councils and ideas on how alcohol can be marketed responsibly. Local authorities, the Scottish Government and the European Union all work on alcohol policy. Retailers and many drinks manufactures also have codes for responsible advertising and selling of alcohol.

In 2012 the Scottish Parliament agreed to introduce a new minimum price per unit of alcohol in an attempt to raise the price of low-cost drink to reduce alcohol-

related harm. The Church of Scotland has supported moves to make alcohol less affordable since the 1980s and have welcomed the minimum unit price idea.

A minimum unit price has not yet been implemented due to legal challenges by drinks manufacturers.

What the Church has said

In 2009 the General Assembly received a report on substance misuse and addictions. The Church acknowledged the place of responsible drinking in today's society, and encouraged all Church members to re-examine their attitudes to alcohol in the light of the damaging consequences of its use.

As Christians we recognise that all of us are made in God's image and are part of God's creation. Thus every individual has inherent, intrinsic value and all have equal value in the eyes of God. This must inform our approach to addiction. We are of value by dint of our existence and not through contributions that we may or not make to our wider world and society. Every individual is of worth and it should be our hope that all are able to fulfil their God given potential.



Get involved locally

Local congregations can play an important part in the community. Why not suggest, e.g. at a Kirk Session or Presbytery meeting, how the church can:

- Engage with your Licensing Board's current process for reviewing its alcohol licensing policy. This is best done through your Council's Local Licensing Forum, (see your Council website), or via Alcohol Focus Scotland, which has plenty of useful information on all aspects of the issue. If you have a Community Council, it should be already doing this, since current consultations about local licensing policy statements are taking place all over Scotland.
- Support local substance misuse services. Information broken down by local authority is available on the Alcohol Focus Scotland website www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/local-services.
- Encourage support groups such as AA or Al-Anon, perhaps by offering a free meeting space.
- Help, or even start, a local Street Pastor project www.streetpastors.co.uk.
- Do more to promote personal responsibility within congregations on issues relating to alcohol harm and substance misuse.

► Questions for Reflection

Read John 2:1-11; the wedding in Cana.

This miracle is the first of Jesus' signs, it 'revealed his glory'; drinking is clearly a way of life in the Bible! Jesus himself was born in an inn, and the Psalms talk about how wine gladdens the heart, and are part of the good things which God has provided for us. The Lord's Supper is at the heart of Christian sacramental worship, with its focus point the shared wine, representing Christ's blood.

The Bible is also clear, from the Old Testament prophets and wisdom through to the Epistles of the New Testament that drunkenness and excess is harmful, it is clear that we should demonstrate self-restraint.

- Why does the Bible contradict itself, when on the one hand it seems to encourage drinking but on the other hand condemn it?
- How do the different authors and different audiences for the different parts of the Bible mean that we need to think carefully about what the text is telling us today?
- Many church buildings are alcohol-free, and use non-alcoholic grape juice rather than alcoholic wine. Do you think this is an important witness against alcohol abuse, providing a sanctuary for those who have problems drinking, or is it an unnecessary rule now that cheap alcohol is available in every high street off-licence?
- If you drink, consider a call to abstinence, or at least that you demonstrate responsible drinking.
- If you do not drink, consider that your words and actions do not present a judgemental attitude.

More information

Drinkline –

if you are concerned about your own or someone else's drinking and would like to speak to someone now:
tel: 0800 7 314 314

Alcohol Focus Scotland –

www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

CrossReach – Substance Misuse Services

www.crossreach.org.uk/substance-misuse
tel: 0131 657 2000

Hope UK –

resources for schools and churches
www.hopeuk.org
tel: 020 7928 0848

One too many...?

A briefing on alcohol misuse from the Methodist Church, URC and Baptist Union of GB
www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/pionetoomany_1009.pdf

Street Pastors

www.streetpastors.co.uk

▣ Keep in Touch

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▶ Discussion Points